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EARLY DAYS IN WASHTENAW COUNTY

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Dr. Ford began his talk by quoting from the prayer offered at the ceremony in 1847 marking the dedication of the new capitol building in Lansing, which had just replaced Detroit as the capitol of the youthful state of Michigan. The parson prayed with great earnestness for the new community so signally honored by the State - a community which, he said, was in the heart of an area of wilderness which until recent months had been unbroken and unvisited.

A scant generation earlier, Dr. Ford pointed out, not only the central portion, but the entire area of Michigan, except for Detroit, was unbroken and unvisited; not until after 1825 did settlers come in any numbers. A factor of chief importance in accounting for the relative lateness of settlement in Michigan, as compared with neighboring Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, was the estimate of the Michigan area reported by Federal surveyors in connection with a provision of Congress in 1912 setting aside 6,000,000 acres for soldiers (each soldier to be allotted 160 acres), of which 2,000,000 were to be surveyed in Michigan. The surveyors found no lands in Michigan fit for cultivation:

> On approaching the eastern part of the military lands, toward the private claims on the straights and lake, the country does not contain so many swamps and lakes, but the extreme sterility and barrenness of the soil continues the same. Taking the country altogether, so far as has been explored, and to all appearances, together with the information received concerning the balance, it is so bad there would not be more than one acre out of a hundred, if there would be one out of a thousand, that would in any case admit of cultivation.

The force of the "Westward Movement" was, however, too powerful to permit even so discouraging a report to have more than a temporary effect. It was said at this time that a covered wagon left Detroit every five minutes for the west. With the development of steam navigation on the Great Lakes, in 1825 the opening of the Erie Canal, and the building of a military road from Detroit to the West, Michigan became much more accessible to potential settlers; the filling up of the farming areas of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois stimulated greater

interest in Michigan; when, in the 1830's, lines of railroad began to appear, a veritable flood of settlement swept into the lower portion of the peninsula.

Dr. Ford pointed out that the Washtenaw area was directly in the path of this flood, as it swept westward from Detroit. Mentioning as significant early events preceding settlement, the establishment of Godfroy's post on the Huron, 1809-20, and Judge Woodward's 1822 purchase for speculative purposes of 80 acres where the Michigan Union now stands, Dr. Ford remarked that when the boundaries of Washtenaw County were defined in 1822, there was not a white person living within its limits. Washtenaw County, which originally included, besides its present area, the land now included in the two eastern tiers of Jackson County, the two southern tiers of Livingston County, and the four southeastern townships of Ingham County (the equivalent of 42 six-mile-square townships, in all) was organized in 1826 with three townships: the Township of Ypsilanti, including present Augusta, Ypsilanti, Superior, and Salem; the Township of Ann Arbor, including York, Pittsfield, Ann Arbor, Northfield, and Green Oak and Brighton of present-day Livingston County; and the Township of Dexter, including besides present-day Dexter, the thirty other six-mile squares in the County.

The chief routes into this large area were the Huron River, the military road, the Pottawattomie Trail, the railroad (which reached Dexter in 1841) and the Territorial Road. Woodruff's Grove, established by Major Benjamin Woodruff in 1823, was the first settlement in the County, with Woodruff the first justice, the first sheriff, the first postmaster of which the County could boast. Here in 1825 the first grist mill was set up. John Bryan and his family arrived October 23, 1823, having traveled four days by ox-team from Detroit. He built the first bridge over the Huron, in 1827. In 1824, Orente Grant arrived by boat, having made the voyage from Detroit in six days - two days down the Detroit River to the mouth of the Huron, and four days (counting Sunday, on which the men rested from poling the boat) up the Huron. Dr. Ford quoted the statement of Mrs. Alvin Cross, who as a child had been a member of this party:

> Early in the following spring of 1824, Mr. Grant made preparations to return with his family, which consisted of Mrs. Grant, a young girl named Jane Johnson, and myself. Mr. Tuttle's wife and child were also of our company. We shipped at a small place called Venice [Ohio], in the vessel Costello, and took with us provisions enough, as Mr. Grant supposed, to last until crops could be raised. There were four bushels of flour, one barrel of meal, one of shelled corn, one of honey, 2 barrels of potatoes, one barrel of wheat, one cask of pork, one barrel of oats, and a large box of beans and garden seeds. We also had a half barrel in which were carefully packed, in moist earth and moss, small apple-trees, currant bushes, rose bushes, lilac, snowball,

and other shrubs. There was also a large box of carpenter's tools and such bedding and furniture as was considered most necessary.

We were three days in reaching Detroit; there we were obliged to wait three days for the boat to come up from the Grove after us. We were six days in reaching the Grove, stopping the first night at Willard's Tavern. The second day we reached the mouth of the Huron, and stopped at a French house. The third night we were kindly entertained at the house of a half-breed, named Parks. The next day we reached King's settlement; this was Saturday, and here we spent the Sabbath, the men who poled the boat being glad to rest.

Monday night we camped in the woods; and Tuesday about noon reached our destination, on the flats, about half a mile down the river from the Grove, where Mr. Tuttle had prepared a home for his family. When we were ready to land, the men began to exchange smiling glances, and Mrs. Tuttle and Mrs. Grant, realizing all at once that this wilderness must now be to them home, began to cry. Jane and I [she was 18] were too young and light-hearted to sympathize with such feelings, and gaily started to see the house, but soon returned, not being able to find anything but a small building, which we supposed to be a sheep-pen. Our ignorance was quite excusable, for the low, rough log pen, without floor or windows, did not resemble a human habitation. It taxed our ingenuity to prepare dinner on a fire of blazing logs built at one end of the room. There was no fireplace and no chimney, a hole in the roof allowing the smoke to escape. Mrs. Woodruff came down before night to welcome the new arrivals, and I returned with her. That night I first heard the howling of wolves, and was unable to sleep. Next morning, as I stood in the door of Mr. Woodruff's house and looked around, I felt homesick.

By the fourth of July, 1824, there were enough settlers on hand to warrant a community celebration of the national holiday.

The settlers pushed on. On February 12, 1824, Elisha Walker Rumsey bought 640 acres farther up the Huron, where he and John Allen, with 480 acres, became the pioneer settlers of Ann Arbor. Settlers arrived fast. James Noyer, who built the third house in Ann Arbor, took up land where the University now stands; in 1825 he sold 80 acres for $300 to Henry Rumsey, a brother of Elisha Walker Rumsey.

The latter had built the first house in Ann Arbor - at the southwest corner of Huron and First Streets. John Allen's house was at the northwest corner of Huron and Main Streets.

Years later, Mrs. Harriet L. Noble, who had been one of the 1824 pioneer settlers in Ann Arbor, gave a vivid account of the

experiences of her party. Starting for Michigan on September 20, 1824, the group traveled from Geneva, N.Y., to Buffalo in wagons; waited in Buffalo four days for a boat; because the steamer "Michigan" was under repairs, took passage in a schooner for Detroit; spent seven days on Lake Erie, during which there was considerable seasickness among the members of the party; spent two days in Detroit, which the narrator regarded as "filthy, the worst place I ever saw"; on October 31, started for Ann Arbor by wagon and yoke of oxen; made only ten miles the first day, spending the night sleeping on the floor of a tavern [presumably near the present site of Dearborn]; on the next day made half of the distance through the woods to Ypsilanti, camping out that night; on the third day, with the wagon bogging down repeatedly, and much impeded by fallen brush and timber, reached the plains about three miles from Ypsilanti; on the fourth day reached Ann Arbor. Passing through Ypsilanti, Mrs. Noble had had the experience of receiving an invitation from a squaw to swap babies. The only white habitations between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor were two log cabins. What a prospect greeted the family at their journey's end! Mrs. Noble described in some detail the reception the pioneers received:

> There were some six or seven log huts occupied by as many inmates as could crowd into them. It was too much to think of asking strangers to give us a place to stay in even for one night under such circumstances. Mr. John Allen himself made us the offer of sharing with him the comforts of a shelter from storm if not from the cold. His house was large for a log one, but quite unfinished; there was a ground floor and a single loft above. When we got our things stored in this place we found the number sheltered to be 21 women and children, and 14 men. There were but two bedsteads in the house, and those who could not occupy these slept on featherbeds upon the floor. When the children were put in bed, you could not set a foot down without steping on a foot or hand...We cooked our meals in the open air, there being no fire in the house but a small box stove...We lived in this way until our husbands got a log house raised and the roof on; this took them about six weeks, at the end of which time we went into it, without door, floor, chimney, or anything but logs and roof. There were no means of getting boards for a floor, as everything must be brought from Detroit, and we could not think of drawing lumber over such a road. The only alternative was to split slabs of oak with an axe. My husband was not a mechanic, but he managed to make a floor in this way that kept us from the ground. I was most anxious for a door, as the wolves would come about in the evening, and sometimes stay all night and keep up a serenade that would almost chill the blood in my veins. Of all noises I think the howling of wolves and the yelling of Indians the most fearful,- at least so it appeared to me

there when I was not able to close the door against them...We had our house comfortable as such a rude building could be by the first of February.

It was a mild winter; there was snow enough to cover the ground only four days, a fortunate circumstance for us. We enjoyed uninterrupted health, but in the spring the ague, with its accompaniments, gave us a call, and by the middle of August there were but four out of 14 who could call themselves well. We then fancied we were too near the river for health. We sold out and bought again 10 miles west of Ann Arbor, a place which suited us better, and just a year from the day we came to Ann Arbor moved out of it to Dexter.

The year 1824 witnessed 23 different purchases of land in Ann Arbor. By 1825 Ann Arbor had its first doctor, while the family of Bethuel Farrand, arriving the same year, was counted the fifteenth in the settlement.

Ann Arbor soon became a focus for settlement westward and to the north, especially after the opening of the Territorial Road to Jackson in 1829-30. During four months in 1838, 4500 passengers bound for the interior of the state, left Detroit by railroad for Ypsilanti. The railroad reached Ann Arbor in 1839, Dexter in 1841, Marshall in 1843, and Kalamazoo in 1846. Once its western terminus was beyond Ann Arbor, the importance of Ann Arbor as a focus of pioneer travel diminished somewhat, but until the county area was completely filled, the county seat naturally saw much of the new pioneers in the area.

Dr. Ford next gave brief accounts of the settlement of other communities in the County, and continued with some important statistics with regard to the extent of settlement in 1837 and 1840, as given below:

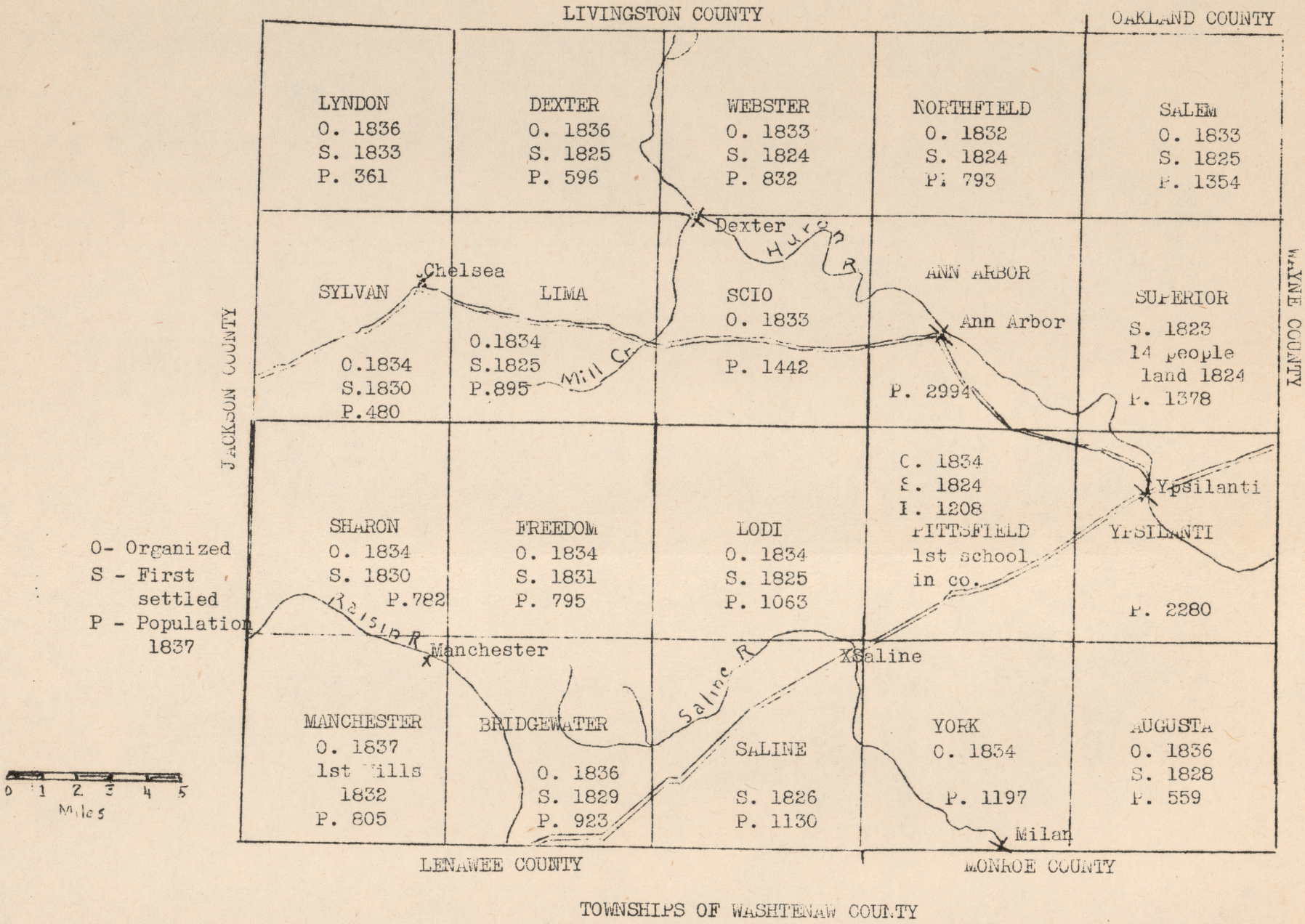
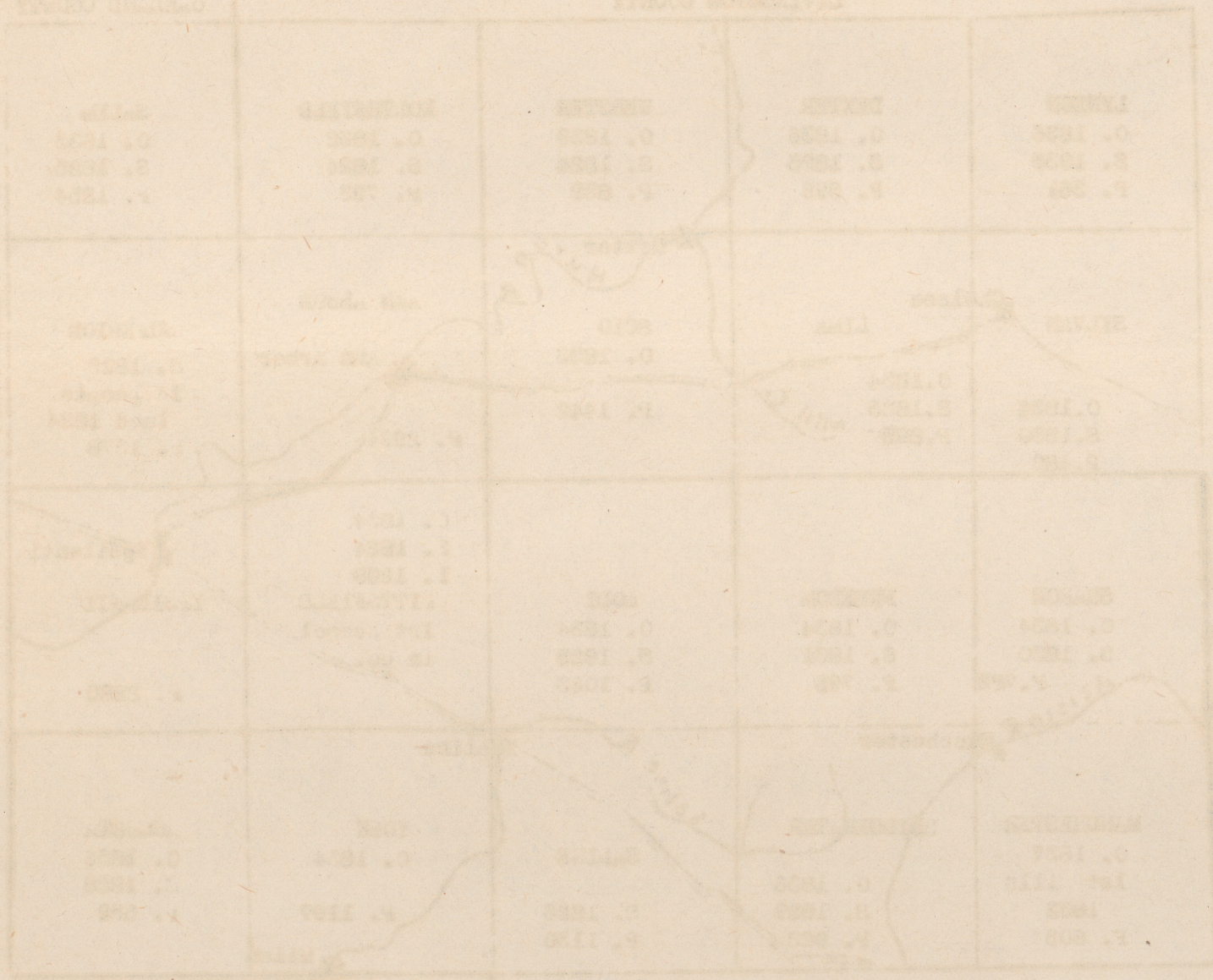
Population of	Detroit in	1819.....	1,450
"	the Territory in	1819.....	8,806
"	Washtenaw County in	1823...	0
"	" "	1830...	4,042
"	" "	1834...	14,920
"	" "	1837...	21,817
"	" "	1840...	23,571
"	Detroit.	1840...	9,000
"	Ann Arbor.	1840...	3,600
"	Ypsilanti.	1840...	2,400
"	Michigan	1840..	212,000

Population of townships of Washtenaw County in 1837:

Ann Arbor	2,994
Augusta	559
Bridgewater	923
Dexter	596
Freedom	795
Lima	895
Lodi	1,063
Lyndon	361
Manchester	805
Northfield	793
Pittsfield	1,208
Salem	1,354
Saline	1,130
Scio	1,442
Sharon	782
Superior	1,378
Sylvan	480
Webster	832
York	1,197
Ypsilanti	2,280

Dr. Ford closed his remarks with an effective tribute to the courage and fortitude of the Washtenaw pioneers.

Ann Arbor, Michigan
January 19, 1943



TOWNSHIPS OF WASHTENAW COUNTY